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DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



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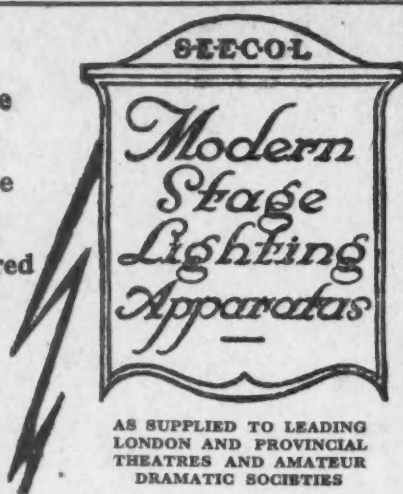
JULY MCMXXX

RECENT PLAYS: BY E. A.
BAUGHAN & THE NATIONAL
THEATRE: BY LEWIS CASSON
& THE THEATRE IN PARIS:
BY PHILIP CARR & THE
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DRAMA

VOL. 8

JULY MCMXXX

NUMBER 19

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

SOME RECENT PLAYS

By E. A. Baughan

AS far as new plays are concerned the month (from May 19 to June 18) may be briefly dismissed. "The Last Chapter" at the New Theatre (May 27) begins with Owen Nares dead in a chair and works backward to the solving of a mystery which seemed to puzzle the first night audience. The part of a heartless Don Juan hardly suits Owen Nares, but he acted it pleasantly and with personal distinction. The cast includes some of the most talented and beautiful young actresses now on the stage. "Petticoat Influence," St. Martin's Theatre (May 28) is a bright and witty play extremely well acted and produced. It will probably prove to be Neil Grant's first big success. "The Way to Treat a Woman," Duke of York's Theatre (June 6) is a typical Walter Hackett piece. It has the air of a charade, as if it had been made up from scene to scene. Marion Lorne has the usual opportunities for expressing the muddle-headed fear and daring of which she is a mistress. It is not a bad entertainment.

Finally, there was R. C. Sheriff's "Badger's Green" at the Prince of Wales's Theatre (June 12). Theatrical journalists had been busily asking the question, "Will it be a second 'Journey's End'?" The question is ridiculous and unfair. The author had no intention of writing another war play but only a bright comedy of English life. The observation and clear characterisation which really made the success of "Journey's End" again prove that Sheriff is a dramatist. His grasp of stage effect is very firm and he knows how to write natural and revealing dialogue. The play is very slight, it is true, but I found it a delightful entertainment. But Sheriff must try to find a subject which will compel him

to cut below the surface of life. He had such a subject in "Journey's End." At present the other sex seems to him but a decoration of life. This new play shows that he has humour and that should enable him to write some excellent English comedies.

Turning from new plays the month has been interesting. First of all there is Paul Robeson's Othello (Savoy Theatre, May 10). This talented Negro actor has been praised for his impressive immobility, for his naturalness and for the strength of his emotion. But characterisation in Shakespeare must be conditioned by the fact that the *dramatis personae* speak in verse. That must be the measure of their naturalness. This Moor was not the romantic figure of Shakespeare's imagination. Technically, many points were missed by the actor, whose big voice is wanting in sensitive modulations. The poor Iago of Maurice Browne, who, at the time of writing has left the cast, threw the play out of gear. Nor could I admire the stage setting of James Pryde except from a pictorial point of view. All the action had to take place nearly at the back of the stage with the result that the acting seemed very remote. Nor did the production of Ellen Van Volkenburg help the drama except in the making of living pictures.

As far as production goes we had much better examples in the Alexander Moissi Productions of Tolstoy's "The Living Corpse" (Globe Theatre, May 21) and "Hamlet" (May 29). The company he brought with him was quite above the average and the ensemble and lighting were a lesson to London producers. Moissi himself was a disappointment. He has an insignificant stage presence. On the other hand, he has a very sensitive

SOME RECENT PLAYS

voice which enables him to make all kind of points which the ordinary actor misses. I should like to see him in comedy, for he is by nature a comic and not a tragic actor. As a play "Hamlet" was cut to ribbons. It was used simply as a vehicle for the star.

The Pitoëff production at the same theatre (June 5) of Bernard Shaw's "Saint Joan" gave us a curious mixture of the pictorial and the dramatic. A triptich frame at the back of the stage may have been an advantage in the small Théâtre des Arts in Paris but it had no point on the Globe stage. Pitoëff's production is not merely pictorial, however. He has worked up to the trial and martyrdom as the climax of the play. The trial itself was a wonderful example of real stage production. Ludmilla Pitoëff's Joan was here a very pathetic figure. But it is a mistake to make her a kind of Saint from the first. That knocks the bottom out of Bernard Shaw's epilogue. This Saint Joan is never the simple peasant girl to whom the "voices" give inspiration.

Ludmilla Pitoëff afterwards appeared as Marguerite in "La Dame aux Camélias." The action of the play is set in an oval gold frame. This had a good effect in the opening scene but marred the drama in the more emotional climaxes. The device of showing the gambling hell in silhouette with an opening between the two curtains on which are thrown the shadows of the gamblers quite spoiled the theatrical effect of the scene when Armande throws his gains at the feet of his lover. That is a great scene in the ordinary productions of this play and there is no artistic sense in running away from theatrical effect simply because it is old-fashioned. Ludmilla Pitoëff again was very pathetic in her death scene, but she is not really the actress for this showy part. She follows Duse more than Sarah Bernhardt in the general style of her acting, but she has not the great Italian's power of expressing hidden emotions. The new Marguerite was sensitive and natural but rather ordinary and commonplace in a refined manner.

PEOPLE'S THEATRES INTERNATIONAL

THE Fourth General Meeting of the "Comité International pour les Théâtres Populaires" was held at Liège on Tuesday, June 11, at the same time as the twelfth "Concours International d'Art Dramatique and Lyrique."

The latter Congress took the form of a dramatic festival somewhat on the lines of our own National Festival of Community Drama. Over seventy Societies had made the journey to Liège, and for three days, in various classes, had competed before French and Belgian judges, among whom were such distinguished playwrights as Messrs. Tristan Bernard, Henry Kistemaekers, Max Maurey, and Charles Vildrac.

I was present at the "Final," at which the three best performances were re-enacted. The winners were a Company from Barcelona, and their play was "Le rétable de la Fleur," a mediaeval mystery by M. Louis Masrera, who himself produced the play and had designed the scenery. A very excellent performance it was.

The only condition of entry to this competition appears to be that the plays should be acted in the French language, and this allows competitors from Switzerland and Belgium,

as well as from France. The movement is directed from Paris by a Committee presided over by M. Claude Roland. The Federation was founded at Nancy in 1907, and in 1928 a notable Congress was held under its auspices at Strasbourg, with M. Raymond Poincaré as President. It was, indeed, a pleasure to find evidence of such splendid activity in French community drama, and I was able to bring back with me the fraternal good wishes of M. Claude Roland to all those who are conducting similar work in this country.

As for the "Comité International pour les Théâtres Populaires," the foundation of the Committee dates from 1923, and its chairman is Dr. Fr. Herman of Prague. Its object is to provide a focus-point for the community drama movement all over the world, and an annual Bulletin is to be issued which should be of considerable value. The meeting at Liège was attended by about a dozen delegates from various countries, among whom were Mr. Jessop and Mr. Sexton of the National Operatic and Dramatic Association, and the present writer.

GEOFFREY WHITWORTH.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE

THE COMMITTEE'S REPORT AND MR. GRANVILLE-BARKER'S BOOK

Reviewed by Lewis Casson

THERE is no more fascinating pursuit than the building of castles, and there can never have been an aerial castle so solidly built, so magnificently furnished and so completely equipped as that projected by William Archer and Mr. Granville-Barker in their Scheme and Estimates for a National Theatre (Duckworth, 1911).

Nearly thirty years have passed since that vision, and the castle, though still somewhat Spanish in design shows glimmerings of becoming more substantial, for in these days the National Theatre is at any rate "in the air." Mr. Granville-Barker's faith is undiminished, for he has published a revised version* of the original scheme, and it has the support of the Committee recently appointed to provide the Prime Minister with a concrete scheme.

The Committee's report (re-printed at the conclusion of this article) appeared simultaneously with Mr. Granville-Barker's book, and roughly speaking it is a summary of it. There are trifling differences in the governing body. The Report calls for a Board of fifteen governors, but they are to appoint an Advisory Council of three of their number and three outsiders, which will actually do the work, and so corresponds to some extent with Mr. Granville-Barker's governing body of nine. He, however, insists that while the governors control the general policy, the actual running of the theatre, apart from the choice of plays, must be in the hands of the Director.

The Report seems to suggest that the Advisory Committee might be asked to contribute a certain amount of advice and moral support—an idea upon which Mr. Granville-Barker appears to pour great scorn.

In only two important points does the Report differ from Mr. Granville-Barker's scheme. The Report demands that the National Theatre Company should tour at intervals in "other towns of Great Britain and the Empire." This sounds attractive, but in Mr. Granville-Barker's view there would be no adequate return for the enormous outlay involved, the risks of letting the theatre, and the disorganisation of the repertory.

He agrees, however, to the idea of separate touring companies attached to the National Theatre.

The other point of difference is an ambiguity in the Report as to the one essential in which Mr. Granville-Barker's revised scheme differs from that of thirty years ago. The Committee call for one theatre to hold 1,800 people with "space for an additional smaller auditorium."

Mr. Granville-Barker is convinced of the absolute necessity from the start of two theatres under one roof, one to hold 1,800, the other 1,000, and I think he has proved his case. In everything but the original capital outlay he contends there would be a definite economy, always supposing there is an available audience to supply both theatres at least eight times a week. As we are quite in the dark on this last point and the additional capital cost is not much in the huge sum involved, I think we had better plump for the two-theatres scheme. There is no doubt it is a far more practical proposition for actual running, and it is the only way of keeping fully employed the large company necessitated by the Shakespeare repertory.

There is one rather quaintly phrased recommendation in the Report that calls for comment: "The Director, if an actor, shall not practice his art during his term of office." It reminded me of another hopeful scheme of years ago for an Art Theatre for London, drawn up, it is true, by a writer on *Punch*, but quite serious. It started off: Rule 1. The director's wife shall not be a member of the company.

Both the new schemes advocate the appropriation of the surplus funds of the B.B.C. for raising the capital for founding the theatre. This surplus is now paid into the Treasury, so the difference between this and drawing directly on the Taxes may be more apparent than real. But the suggestion is eminently practical and has the advantage of being thoroughly English.

Mr. Granville-Barker's new book is extraordinarily readable, where the original savoured somewhat of a Blue Book. Everyone interested in the theatres whether Nationalists or not, must read the chapter on "The Need for a National Theatre," if only for its criticisms on present day conditions, modern English

* "A National Theatre," by Harley Granville-Barker. Sidgwick & Jackson, 5s.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE

acting, and the hopelessness of any real improvement without a theatre that combines stability, a high standard of work, and a flexible organisation.

The author makes short work of those who advocate the timid policy of a small beginning.

"A National Theatre cannot be begun in a small way. And anyone who thinks it can should be asked to work out the full implications of his heresy The main features of the scheme. . . are essential parts of its 'economic dimension'; the spacious and fully equipped building with its rehearsal rooms and scene studios and stores, a self-contained factory in which between forty to fifty productions a year could be prepared or kept in being; the large and small auditorium and stage in which both more popular and less popular plays could each be economically acted, and the true repertory system that lets a play be acted either as often or as seldom as there is a call for it; the company numerous and well assorted enough for the casting of any play, and for giving (in the two houses) of from eight hundred to nine hundred performances a year—upon *these* things both the artistic integrity and the finance of the scheme rest; and there can be no compromise, nor is there any half way house to them. One is astonished to hear presumably instructed people exclaiming 'No bricks and mortar. A National Theatre Company by all means. The best plays, the best acting, but no vast unwieldy building.' As well say to the Rolls-Royce Company 'motor cars, if you please, and the best of their kind. But no factory!' A National Theatre must command attention not apologetically beg for it. Adequately endowed and run upon generous lines, it can probably pay its way in a duly limited sense while it fulfils its task. Tinkered at, it will do neither. It will be a poor half-starved thing, shunned by the best dramatists and actors, and by the best of the public; or to sustain it in respect, it will need extravagant subsidies."

The latter part of the book gives the full scheme, with all its financial details checked and criticised by experienced managers. The whole thing could be put in motion to-morrow and be in full working order in ten years. Nothing is lacking but the faith that the British public are going to put down at the Box Office window something over £200,000 a year to see fine plays finely acted. It sounds an immense sum, but it is lessened when one remembers that two long-run theatres of similar size would expect to average between them £150,000 a year at least to show a profit, and that some of them are doing it. Immense sums are spent on public amusement. Some of it could surely be diverted.

We optimists still try to believe that excellence of every kind will eventually draw its public, in spite of much evidence that nothing succeeds but a "Success." And surely such a theatre would bring back some of the vast number of educated people who

have long given up the theatre-going habit. There is certainly a strong rising curve of interest in the intelligent theatre in the Amateur and Educational worlds all over the country. On the other hand there is an equally strong falling curve in the success of the commercial theatre. Whether the curves will cross in time to save the professional theatre from temporary extinction is still doubtful. A bold launching of this big scheme might decide the question. But do we really care? In this book Mr. Granville-Barker has reaffirmed his faith. But is he yet willing to make for his faith the sacrifice we of the theatre ask of him? Does he not yet realise how we, battling in the dust of the arena, still look up and watch with some exasperation his critical but kindly eye following our struggles; giving us here and there a little mild encouragement when we are longing for the help of his strong right arm?

MEMORANDUM ATTACHED TO THE REPORT

The appointment of the Committee followed a conference convened by the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee and attended by representatives of the various bodies interested in the proposal to establish a National Theatre in London.

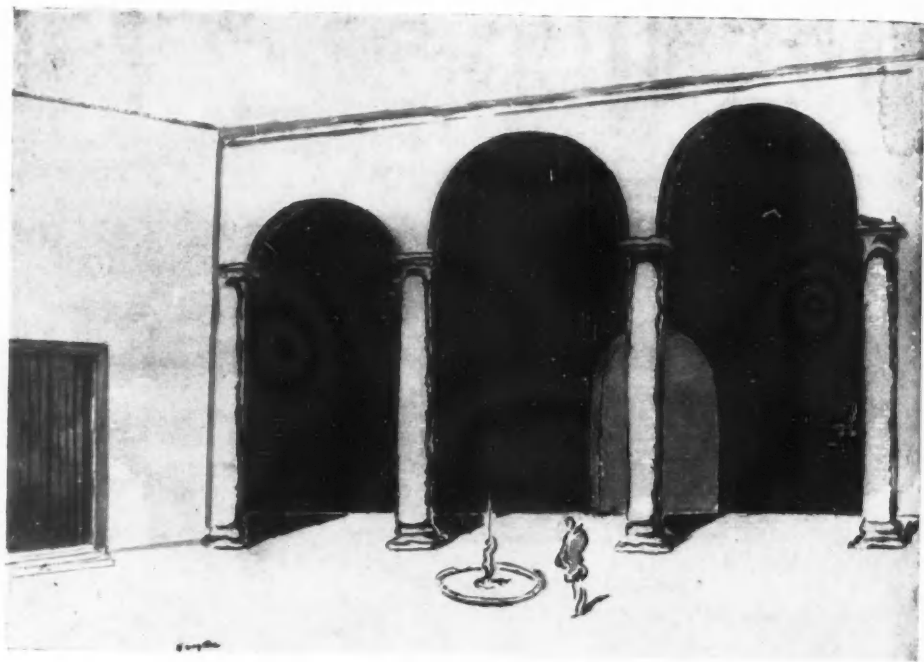
Those appointed to frame an agreed scheme were the Earl of Lytton, Miss Lena Ashwell, Mr. Kenneth Barnes, Sir Israel Gollancz, Mr. Percy A. Harris, M.P., Major Hills, M.P., Sir Barry Jackson, Mr. Holford Knight, M.P., Sir Frank Meyer, Professor Allardyce Nicoll, Mr. Walter Payne, Sir Nigel Playfair and Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth.

The report submitted to the Government was accompanied by detailed estimates of probable receipts and expenses, which indicated that, after adequate preliminary expenditure, the theatre might be conducted on a self-supporting basis.

It was explained that the capital necessary to establish the theatre on the lines of the report could probably be raised if the Government would provide a grant to meet the annual charges for interest and sinking fund over a fixed and comparatively short period of years. Such a grant of approximately £100,000 a year, it was pointed out, could be made without difficulty from the proceeds of the licenses



MADAME PITOËFF AS "SAINTE JEANNE"
FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY MR. POLLARD
CROWTHER SPECIALLY TAKEN FOR
"DRAMA" DURING A PERFORMANCE AT
THE GLOBE THEATRE. BY COURTESY
OF MR. C. B. COCHRAN AND
MR. MAURICE BROWNE.



OTHELLO: "A HALL IN THE CASTLE,"
FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY
MR. JAMES PRYDE, SAVOY THEATRE
PRODUCTION. BY COURTESY OF
MR. MAURICE BROWNE.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE

for wireless receivers, which already provide an income of £300,000 a year, after paying the commission of the Post Office and the expenses of the British Broadcasting Corporation.

The Committee pointed out that this fund was not part of the general revenue from taxation, but was obtained by the sale of licences for the maintenance of a wireless receiver, and might, therefore, quite properly be allocated to the promotion of music and drama. The Committee suggested that the fund might be placed in the hands of trustees under a charter authorising them to make grants therefrom to schemes for the provision of music and drama which might from time to time, be approved by them.

TEXT OF THE REPORT

The Committee appointed the Earl of Lytton as Chairman, and Sir Israel Gollancz as Honorary Secretary.

The Committee have held ten meetings (in addition to meetings of sub-committees), and have considered the scheme of the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre adopted in 1909 and also a scheme recently prepared by the British Drama League.

They beg leave to report as follows:—

1. The Committee are of opinion that the proposal to establish a National Theatre in London to be regarded as a Shakespeare Memorial is practicable, and that every effort should be made to carry it into effect.

2. The objects of the National Theatre should be:—

(i) To provide in the Capital of the Empire a theatre where the people may have continual opportunities of seeing the best plays of all ages worthily presented on the stage;

(ii) to keep the plays of Shakespeare in its repertory;

(iii) to revive whatever is vital in British drama;

(iv) to prevent recent plays of merit from falling into oblivion;

(v) to produce new plays and to further the development of the modern drama;

(vi) to produce translations of representative works of foreign drama, ancient and modern.

(vii) to stimulate the art of the theatre through the varied opportunities which it will afford.

3. To accomplish the aforestated purposes the Theatre should be organised upon a repertory system.

4. The controlling authority of the Theatre should be a Board of Governors, not exceeding fifteen, appointed by the Prime Minister (vacancies to be filled by him), which shall meet at least four times a year, and shall appoint the Managing Staff of the Theatre, consisting of (i) the Director, (ii) the Assistant Director, and (iii) the Treasurer and Business Manager.

5. As the Offices of the Theatre would require the assistance of co-operation of the Governors in the discharge of their responsibilities to an extent which could not be conveniently provided by the whole Board, the Governors should appoint an advisory Council,

consisting of three of their number, and not more than three persons of experience from outside (who should receive a fee for attendance). The Advisory Council should meet regularly and discuss with the Director, the Assistant Director, and the Treasurer and Business Manager, the general policy of the Theatre.

6. The Treasurer in consultation with the Director should prepare and submit for the approval of the Governors, at such intervals as they may require, the estimates of expenditure.

7. Within the limits of the approved estimates the Director should select, engage, and dismiss all artists and other employees, except the Assistant Director, and the Treasurer and Business Manager, and be empowered, after consultation with the Treasurer and Business Manager to make contracts on behalf of the Theatre.

8. The Director, after consultation with the Assistant Director, should be responsible for the programme, which should be submitted to the Advisory Council.

9. The Director, if an actor, should not practice his art during his term of office.

10. The National Theatre Company should, with the approval of the Governors, give performances in other towns of Great Britain and the Empire.

11. There should be a Pension Fund, under conditions to be defined, for the benefit of the regular members of the Company and Staff.

12. To establish a National Theatre on an adequate scale provision must be made for the following requirements:—

(i) Site;

(ii) Building;

(iii) Equipment and initial expenditure.

13. The site should be in some central position, large enough to allow of a building with an auditorium to seat about 1,800, with space for an additional smaller auditorium. In designing the Theatre the possibility of providing a platform stage for the performance of 16th century drama or translations from the Greek drama should be kept in view.

14. The Committee have examined the estimates prepared in the past of the probable cost of such a theatre as is contemplated, and they have revised these in the light of present-day prices. It is impossible to assign exact figures to the different items of capital cost without knowing (1) the site on which the building will be placed, (2) the cost of the land and the work, if any, which would be required on the foundations, (3) the design of the building and the space that would be available for storage of scenery, properties, etc.

15. Towards the amount required the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee could contribute about £100,000.

DRAMA LEAGUE ANNUAL MEETING

The Eleventh Annual Meeting of the League was held at 8 Adelphi Terrace on Friday, June 27th. Miss Lena Ashwell presided. The Minutes of the meeting will be printed in the October number of DRAMA. An announcement concerning the election of Provincial Members of the Council will be found on page 156 of this issue.

THE THEATRE IN PARIS

A REVIEW OF THE SEASON'S PLAYS

By Philip Carr

THE theatrical season ends earlier in Paris than in London. By the end of May some theatres already think of closing for the holidays; by the end of June others are handed over to temporary summer managements, with programmes specially conversed for provincial and foreign visitors; and by the middle of July the only plays which have survived from the earlier part of the year are the really obstinate successes.

It is therefore possible now to form an estimate of the value of the season's work. It has been considerable. There have been many successful plays, and two or three of them have a real artistic value. As much cannot every year be said of the theatrical output of any country. Moreover, in these two or three they do not include Marcel Pagnol's "Marius" and "Topaze," both of which are already two seasons old, but still continue in their well deserved and apparently undiminished popularity.

Jean Giraudoux, whose remarkable play, "Siegfried," ran half way through last season, after having been produced in the season before, has this year provided the Jouvet management with another success. "Amphitryon 38" in spite of its great theatrical ingenuity, seemed to depend upon such a subtle irony and so delicate a literary allusiveness that one doubted of its success with the public. The story of Jupiter assuming the disguise of Alcmene's husband in order to make love to her had been treated by many other dramatists, ancient and modern—that is the meaning of Giraudoux' title. None of them had attempted to make its classical form the vehicle for the same kind of entirely contemporary psychology. At one moment the play reminded one of Meilhac and Halévy's "Belle Hélène," whose comic neo-classicism had as much to do with its success as had Offenbach's music. At another moment one recalled Maurice Baring's dialogues in the same formula but in a more literary spirit. It hardly seemed as if the theatrical effectiveness could carry the minute and almost precious comedy of Giraudoux' verbal analysis and intellectual juggling; but it did, and the play ran for more than a hundred nights—a long time in Paris.

The most successful of the new productions has been Leonard Bourdet's "Le Sexe Faible," which is still filling the Michiodière Theatre. It is the sort of piece to which those whom it annoys refer by saying "of course it is splendidly acted"—in reality a greater compliment to the author than they intend it to be, for good plays make good acting. It is, indeed, admirably acted by the always engagingly natural Victor Boucher and by the whole of his company, but it is also a very effective comedy; effectively constructed, and written with a hard brilliance, which one would describe as good satire, if one felt quite sure that the attack on the vices and foibles of a certain set of international idle rich and their parasites were not made with an eye to the shocked amusement of the attacked and their friends as much as with a genuine social indignation. In any case, it is very amusing, and amusing in a really intelligent way.

Perhaps the most remarkable play of the season, though it had grave faults, among which an extreme diffusion and verbosity, was Fernand Crommelynck's "Carine, la jeune fille folle de son âme." It could hardly hope for a great popular success, and it says much for the high artistic standard of a great part of the French public that it could run successfully as long as it did; for not only were its defects detrimental to any wide appeal, but its very merits were caviare to the general. Its theme was the gradual disillusion of a young bride deeply in love and ready to find ideal beauty and spiritual elevation even in the most complete physical surrender to her love—when she finds that to all those around her, her mother, her friends of the convent school, her uncle, love means something base, and has meant something base even to her husband, if it does not do so still. There are scenes of ecstatic poetry in this play, as well as scenes of passion, which place it, for those who can appreciate their worth, in the highest rank.

Stève Passeur's "l'Acheteuse," which was produced, like "Carine," by the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, is hardly less notable artistically and far more coherently and consistently dramatic. It is at once less serious and more bitter, for

THE THEATRE IN PARIS

although "Carine's" picture of vice is bitter enough, its hymn to virtue is so inspiring that it redeems the author's conception to the greater part of humanity. Passeur's conception of the whole of humanity apparently is that men and women are engaged in a pitiless wild beast struggle, which it is rather entertaining to watch, but in which there is nothing admirable except a sort of desperate ferocity; but he presents that conception with a dramatic force and a strict adherence to the essentials of his theme, which make his least engaging picture interesting, because it is so entirely consistent. "l'Acheteuse" of his title is a woman, no longer young, who has bought herself a husband. As soon as she has married him she discovers that she has not bought his love, but circumstances place him entirely in her power, and she forces him to obey her in every word and movement in a way that is as comic as it is cruel. That these circumstances are a rather extravagant invention of the author matters little. What matters is the use which he makes of the situation when he has created it, and this use is, as I have said, entirely consistent with his view of his character and of life in general.

These are the interesting plays of the season, and the season is nearly over. It is nearly over, that is to say, for most of the Paris theatres; but there is one for which it is never over. The Comédie-Française, in execution of its agreement with the State which subsidizes it, has to give a performance every night of the year, Sundays included, except Good Friday and Christmas day. Some of the most distinguished of the Sociétaires may be away in the summer holidays, but some remain; and it should be remembered that there are always some away—officially resting, but actually supplementing their earnings by lucrative provincial or foreign engagements. They must not appear in Paris in any theatre but the Français, but they are free elsewhere when once they have obtained leave of absence, and unless such leave were pretty frequently granted, they would not be satisfied with their comparatively modest earnings at the National Theatre.

It is not only one legal obligation who keeps the Comédie-Française open through the holidays. It is the one theatre in Paris which is as consistently full then as it is at any other time. Such is its historic and artistic prestige that every tourist, be he foreigner or provincial,

makes a point of paying it a visit. Indeed, in the summer months the classical part of the repertory is more certain of attracting full houses than in the main season. At any time of the year you will find a standard masterpiece of dramatic literature being given on Thursday afternoon, which is the school half-holiday, and perhaps also on Sunday afternoon, when so many modest bourgeois bring the children to the Français as part of their education; but it may be that during a whole week in a winter month there may be no evening performance of a play by Molière or Racine or Corneille or Marivaux or Beaumarchais, and perhaps none by such later authors as Victor Hugo or Alfred de Musset either. I do not mean that the programme will be entirely modern. During the week there will perhaps be a performance of one of the two or three new plays which the Comédie has produced for the first time during the season. The other nights will either be devoted to authors who are no longer modern, but are not yet classics, such as the younger Dumas or Henri Becque, to authors who belong only to the last generation, such as Henri Bataille, or to the works of still living authors, such as Brieux or Porto-Riche, which have already been produced a good many years ago.

Between these and the quite new plays there is a gap; for there is a regulation which does not allow any piece, not originally produced at the Français, to be taken into the repertory until it is twelve years old. This regulation was made in case initial success might not yet have been mellowed by maturer judgement, and the artistic hall-mark of the Français be given to work from which posterity would subsequently withdraw it. The rule has its disadvantages, nevertheless. "Cyrano de Bergerac," for instance, which might have been secured for the Comédie soon after its first success, has become a private vested interest for periodic revivals for a run—there is one going on at this moment. The rule has, in fact, recently been modified by reducing the period in exceptional cases and under special safeguards; but it still exists.

• An important announcement concerning the Drama League Club Room appears on one of our advertisement pages. It will be seen that an extended programme is planned for next Autumn. It may be remarked that many of our country members are finding the Club very useful during visits to town.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE.

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Chairman of the Council:
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Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

IT is with deep regret that we record the death of Sir Israel Gollancz, which removes from our world a devoted student of Shakespeare, and one of the most faithful servants of the National Theatre movement. As Honorary Secretary of the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee, Sir Israel had laboured in that cause for nearly thirty years, and it is largely due to his foresight and persistence that the integrity of that Committee's objective was maintained unimpaired. His desire to promote the popular appreciation of Shakespeare came to fruition in the world-wide observance of "Shakespeare Day," while his last public work was concerned with the drafting of the National Theatre Report, which is printed elsewhere in this Number of "Drama." Primarily a scholar, Sir Israel found at King's College a sphere of activity which might well have in itself proved sufficient for any ordinary man. But an uncommon generosity of nature involved a wider scope, and whether as Secretary of the British

Academy or as a pioneer in the field of Drama, his unfailing kindness and enthusiasm won for him the high esteem of many far-removed from University circles.

This issue of "Drama" goes to press before the Annual Meeting of the League, but it gives us the opportunity to announce the names of the new members of the Council elected by the ten Provincial Areas into which the country has been divided. These names are as follows: Mr. R. Douglas Robertson, Mr. G. Sharman, Miss Constance Radford, Mrs. Nesfield Cookson, Mr. D. Haydn Davies, Mr. Boughton Chatwin, Mr. R. C. Wallhead, Mr. B. J. Benson, Mrs. Gordon Whitmore and Miss Carritt.

Societies affiliated to the League, and individual members, are invited to assist the Council during the coming Autumn in continuing the propaganda that has already been undertaken on behalf of the National Theatre. We should be glad to hear from any of our members who are prepared to organise debates or lectures on this topic, and would welcome their communications as soon as possible, so that the necessary programmes may be drawn up before the holidays.

Members of the League are reminded that any items for the Agenda at the Autumn Conference of the League (to be held this year at Exeter during the week-end beginning Friday, October 31st), must be received at the offices of the League not later than Monday, September 1st. A very attractive programme for the Conference is in course of construction, and the hospitality of the West country is proverbial.

According to our custom, "Drama" will not be published during August and September, and the Library will be closed for cleaning and re-equipment from August 1st—23rd.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by Norman Marshall

"The Endless Road." By Sigmund Graff and Carl Hintze. English version by Graham Rawson.

"Scandal at Court." By Graham Rawson. John Lane 2s. 6d.

"Plays Out of Time." By Harold F. Rubinstein. Putnam 7s. 6d.

"Paint, Powder and Patches." By H. Stanley Redgrove and Gilbert A. Foan. Heinemann 7s. 6d.

BY a curious coincidence "The Endless Road," a German war-play, arrived on the last day of the London run of "Journey's End," although it was actually written in 1926, before Mr. Sherriff's play. Comparison between the two plays is inevitable, as superficially they are very similar. Regarded as a realistic picture of war, the German play is the more vivid. Its realism is of the kind which relies less on the selection of photographic detail and more on the creation of an atmosphere of intolerable nerve-strain by means of the staccato rhythm of the dialogue, finely translated by Mr. Graham Rawson. Page after page consists entirely of the interchange of lines seldom more than four or five words long. The relentless tattoo of these sharp, clipped sentences, on the surface so quiet and restrained, drums upon the mind with an almost physical effect, giving an extraordinarily vivid impression of men with nerves strung taut almost to breaking-point. The play succeeds, too, in doing what "Journey's End" did not attempt; it suggests the hideous immensity of the war. But for this very reason it lacks the humanity of "Journey's End"; it deals with the sufferings of a whole company instead of a small group of individuals. In popular appeal there could be no competition between the two plays. "Journey's End" is packed full of "entertainment value." It has plenty of comic relief, easily recognisable types, strongly dramatic situations, plenty of sentiment, and a flavouring of the heroic which on its production in Berlin won for the play the approval of the militaristic section of the German press. To admit all this does not affect one's respect for the sincerity of Mr. Sherriff's play or the skill or restraint with which it is written. Probably every really good play possesses this quality of being "good entertainment." As one left the theatre after "Journey's End" one heard the audience telling one another that they had "thoroughly enjoyed it"; but one can hardly imagine anyone "thoroughly enjoying" a performance of "The Endless Road." Its realism is too relentless, its emotion too stark for that. It is a profoundly moving and impressive piece of work which in the fewest possible words and little reliance on physical details gives a more appalling impression of the utter hideousness and futility of war than any other play or novel on the subject which I have read.

In Mr. Rawson's own play, rather clumsily entitled "Scandal at Court," the dialogue has something of the same incisiveness which makes his translation of "The Endless Road" so satisfying. The play is notable for an extremely human and likeable portrait of Frederick the Great achieved without recourse to any of the usual historical incidents and scenes upon which dramatists dealing with a period usually build up their play. Frederick is merely shown dealing with a comparatively trivial domestic intrigue—which incidentally provides

the play with a good story—but at the end of the play one is left with an extraordinarily vivid impression of his personality and a very real understanding of the greatness of his character, far more real than if the author had taken the easier and more obvious course of showing Frederick dealing with some of the more important and flamboyant historical incidents of his reign.

Mr. Rubinstein's book of plays is an exceptionally readable one. The themes of the plays are thoroughly fresh and original, the characters are drawn with a firm and lively touch, the dialogue combines swiftness and polish with complete realism. And yet there is something lacking in these plays, something which would make them not as satisfying on the stage as they are in print. It is difficult to define this quality. Perhaps it is a lack of breadth in the writing, an absence of the cruder colours and more sweeping lines which the theatre requires. Sometimes these plays remind one of a theatre back-cloth painted by an artist whose real talents are those of an etcher.

"Paint, Powder and Patches" is a handbook on make-up divided into two parts, of which the first deals with the composition and preparation of the various articles of make-up. The second part deals with the actual practice of make-up. This is the first time I have come across a book on the subject which takes into consideration the fact that nowadays few stages are lit mainly by floats and battens, and that the introduction of spots and projectors from the front of the house has modified many of the oldest rules of make-up. The author might with advantage have dealt further with the effect of the various tints of light upon make-up, as his instructions often seem to be based on the assumption that the stage is flooded with a blaze of crude, white light, although the use of large amounts of white light is now almost obsolete. But on the whole this is a thoroughly sound and up-to-date book on the subject, and one which was badly needed. There are sixteen plates and plenty of diagrams, a chapter on film make-up, and an unusually good bibliography. The writing is extremely clear so long as the authors have no opportunity for indulging their weakness for the most florid sort of journalese.

HAMPSTEAD

Of course "You Never Can Tell" is a delightful play, but I tremble to think how dated it would have appeared had not Mr. Jocelyn Ledward and Mr. Charles Thomas, the producers, had the inspiration to dress and set the play in 1896. The Play and Pageant Union cast that won the Howard de Walden cup were praised for the evenness of their playing and their team work. Well, it must be something in the Hampstead air that fosters this virtue, for the teamwork of this cast too, was the most remarkable thing about the performance. For this very reason I avoid mentioning individual performances. Considering the resources at their command, the stage management of the P. and P.U. are to be congratulated on the dresses, setting, lighting, and the smoothness with which the innumerable properties were managed.

HUGH GEE.

THE ART OF STAGE LIGHTING

A Lecture by C. Harold Ridge

DURING the course of his remarks the lecturer* said, the history of stage lighting was an interesting subject. Hitherto lighting had been used almost exclusively as a medium of illumination, and not as the artist used his colours on his canvas for the purpose of creating a certain psychic condition on his public. In short, lighting had been a craft and not an art. To-day we must face it as both at once.

The modern tendency away from realistic production had resulted in elaborate experiments on the Continent, and to a very limited extent in England and America. A masterly study of these experimental methods is given in "Twentieth Century Stage Decoration" by Hume and Fuerst. It is significant that these authors in their concluding chapter come back once more to the fundamental fact that the theatre can only live in the actor.

It might be imagined that the stage machinery which served the old realistic melodrama and the like is no longer necessary. But, on the contrary, it is now of the greatest use for scene-shifting and scene-building purposes. With the newer three-dimensional plastic settings, quick changes are only possible with some form of rolling or wagon stage, or other machinery, unless a very large staff is employed.

The tendency for the proscenium to disappear and for the actor to return to the old fore-stage once more has resulted in the lights coming forward also, and nearly all theatres nowadays are using projectors from the auditorium. It is to be hoped that theatre architects will make proper provision for these, so that they can be decently concealed, though it is significant that among the advanced theatre directors there is an ever-growing feeling against any kind of "illusion" in production.

In Germany one notices more and more that no attempt is made to prevent the audience from "seeing the wheels go round."

Terence Gray at the Festival Theatre, Cambridge, has abandoned the use of the

curtain in many of his productions, and scene changes are carried out in sight of the audience. These changes are done in silence, as a kind of drill, and the stage hands wear some sort of uniform. It should be understood that the scenes in question are not realistic "sets" but consist of some formalized arrangement of a symbolical or decorative nature. The lighting is usually reduced to a minimum for the change and is brought back to full intensity as the ensuing scene commences.

Another great tendency is to provide as part of the general design some form of permanent background to the stage, which can be flooded with light or have projected upon it some design, and thus do away with the old back drops, with the painted landscapes and false perspectives, and especially with the overhead borders. Such backgrounds, known as cycloramas, artificial horizons, skydomes (Kuppelhorizont) and so on, have been used in Germany and elsewhere for years, and in the first instance were designed for purely realistic effects—skies with moving clouds and similar natural phenomena.

It is a curious fact that, whether stage lighting follows or leads fashions in production all the most useful inventions and improvements have come from persons or firms whose one object is to create realistic effects. He (the lecturer) personally thought stage illumination must be so arranged as to be completely flexible and enable any producer with the minimum of time and expense to light a play in any manner he may desire, from the photographically realistic to the completely abstract.

The lighting should serve as the handmaid of the theatre and should be subservient to the action of the play and the art of the actor. It was desirable, therefore, that both the master electrician and the producer should have the necessary training and ability to coordinate the lighting with the various other factors in a production so as to achieve an harmonious whole. Such electricians and producers were rare indeed in this country. In Central Europe the régisseur was frequently proficient in every department of the production under his direction.

* Speaking to the Society of Illuminating Engineers, at the Royal College of Music, Jan. 21st, 1930.

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The value to the contemporary theatre of the backgrounds mentioned already was that they were useful for general atmosphere, and for giving a sense of space and distance, and that they both simplified and cheapened production when once installed, especially where frequent changes of programme were intended. They were also a very useful accoustic instrument.

Under the long-run system prevalent in the West End of London there might be good reason for not attempting these methods and for sticking to the traditional form of closed-in stage with its borders overhead. But should we ever build a National Theatre, or should the Bill at present before Parliament enable Municipal Authorities to run theatres. It was to be hoped that the open type of stage would be used. While the cost of scenery in a West End production was a negligible item for a successful run, it was a grave charge for the repertory theatre. The Burg Theatre in Vienna saved many thousands a year by the use of a cyclorama and a machine which was in the nature of a magic lantern and known as the G.K.P. Projector.

Many people were familiar with an English invention of a similar kind, called the Mutochrome. Whereas the G.K.P. Projector is now an article of commerce, the Mutochrome is only in use in small sizes in the studio. From experiments and tests which he (the lecturer) had had the privilege of conducting with the manufacturers at the Festival Theatre, Cambridge, he could state that there was no great difficulty in the use of a full-size theatre Mutochrome.

Modern tendencies might be summarized under "Flexibility" and "Use of colour." One great producer, Mr. Granville-Barker, who, before the war, gave London a number of remarkably fine productions, fell short it seemed to him, in his lighting because he refused, except on very rare occasions, to employ coloured light. He seemed to be always trying to capture in the theatre the white light of day, and to have said to himself that tinted light was unnatural. But the white light of day was not to be captured, and its imitation was cold and anemic. Therefore, though tinted light was unnatural, the effect of its use in the theatre was both natural and beautiful. The day was not far off when they could see the electrician an artist as well

as a technical expert, seated at his switchboard like a player at an organ.

In the theatre they had specially designed floods giving an almost infinite range of colour combinations obtained by the use of special colour filters, which gave an approximation to the spectrum colours, and thus painting with light became a practicable possibility. Such floods were particularly suitable for the illumination of cycloramas and artificial horizons.

For the lighting of the stage acting area, battens and floats are still largely used, but nowadays they should always be of the compartment type with some efficient kind of reflector such as silvered glass. Here again a system of colour mixing could be used, and a four-circuit system of red, blue, green and white was far more efficient and flexible than the still popular red, blue, amber and white. Green is a colour which is most useful when used with knowledge, and whereas it cannot be obtained except by using a light or filter of that colour, the omission of amber is of very little importance, because yellows, ambers, and oranges can be produced by mixing red and green. It must be admitted that at present, owing to the difficulty of making pure filters, these synthetic ambers are not so pleasing in themselves as that obtained direct through an amber medium, but they have a less harmful effect on scenery, costumes and make-up. The lecturer continuing said, his personal opinion was that this loss was negligible, because amber light should be used very sparingly in the theatre for general flooding of the acting area. Amber light had spoiled many a scene in the past. The old idea that amber gave a sunshine atmosphere was probably due to the wide-spread use of arc lamps, which required such filters to cut off their excess of blue light. Arcs were now rapidly disappearing, and with the new 20-kilowatt fan-cooled gasfilled lamps they were no longer needed even in large theatres. Gasfilled lamps gave a light which, without any filter, was suitable for the sunshine atmosphere, and the effect on pigments, make-up, and costume was good. Very pale straw-coloured filters could be used if it was desired to take the "edge" off this white light. Gasfilled lamps gave in reality a yellow light, but if used with a filter to produce true white the effect was very cold and

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flat, and this should only be done in special cases, "spotting" for instance, to bring out true natural colours.

General even flooding of the acting area was giving place to unbalanced flooding with greater use of colour. For this purpose, instead of the usual inflexible battens, the "unit type" was finding favour. The unit type of batten took the form of any suitable support for the lamps, such as a metal tube having the wiring carried in troughing. Each circuit terminated in a plug socket so that the lamps to be used could be easily connected and disconnected and varied at will to suit the production in hand. In one case the white batten might be made up of flood boxes used as if they were the compartments of an ordinary batten. In another case they might be entirely filled by spots or focus lamps. Usually a selection of these lamps could be arranged to meet all ordinary requirements. With separate flood units great flexibility was possible, since the angles of the floods could be variously adjusted so as to obtain the maximum illumination where desired on the stage without any hard defined edges.

Where cycloramas were used as a background borders could, and certainly should, be dispensed with, which at once cuts out all but one batten—the front or "Concert" batten. These battens are replaced, if necessary, with acting area floods hanging over the stage and fitted with deep hoods which allowed the lights to shine down on to the stage without spilling on the cyclorama at the back. This was one of the greatest difficulties with cycloramas, that direct light, and consequently shadows, must never be allowed to fall on them. To prevent this, greater care had to be taken in directing lights upwards, downwards or diagonally, according to whether the source was float, batten, or wing light. This extra trouble of adjustment was more than compensated for by the elimination of the objectionable border.

Many attempts had been made to do away with floats (or footlights), but so far without complete success. Floats should be used as a corrective to the principal lighting, and never as a main source of illumination. When used in a theatre having a fore-stage they could be arranged to disappear in a few seconds, leaving a perfectly flat stage, and

this operation could be carried out during a performance by suitable gearing under the stage. Perhaps the best form of footlight of this type was one made in Germany. This float could be used for direct lighting in the ordinary way, or reversed so that the stage only received indirect lighting from a white reflector, the lamps being below stage level. This particular example of indirect lighting was probably the only one in use in the modern theatre. The famous Fortuny system, although giving the most beautiful results, had been found so expensive to run that it had been abandoned everywhere except in the Scala Theatre in Milan.

It was to face problems such as colour mixing and general flexibility that the electrician was demanding in his turn better systems of control. In Germany the electrician was frequently placed immediately under the front of the stage, next to the prompter, with a view of the whole scene through a window in the float. With the ever-increasing size of stage switchboards this was no longer a perfect solution, since the lack of space restricted the electrician's movements. The newer schemes allowed for the separation of the actual switchboard and dimmers and the control board, thus allowing the former to be packed away in any convenient position near the stage, and the control board to be placed in the orchestra or the auditorium, or at any other *point d'appui*. So far as he (the lecturer) knew, the pioneer efforts in this direction were carried out in the Royal College of Music theatre. In this theatre the dimmers were worked by rams operated at the switchboard itself, but there was no reason why the pressure pipes conveying the oil from the control valves to the dimmer rams should not be extended, so that the electrician could operate his switchboard from any position, say from the orchestra, or even from the back of the auditorium.

In conclusion, the lecturer said, the switchboard controlling modern stage apparatus should fulfil the following conditions:— It should allow control by one master electrician, allow instantaneous silent black-outs, and allow dimmers (in every circuit) to be so controlled that any given number of them could be operated together at different speeds and, if necessary, in opposite directions.



THE MODEL SHOWN ABOVE HAS BEEN ARRANGED BY MR. C. HAROLD RIDGE, AT THE SCIENCE MUSEUM, SOUTH KENSINGTON, TO SHOW MODERN SCIENTIFIC METHODS OF THEATRE LIGHTING. IT IS BASED ON THE SCHAUSPIELHAUS AT DRESDEN. VISITORS TO THE MUSEUM ARE THEMSELVES ABLE TO WORK THE "JOY-STICK" DIMMER CONTROLLING THE COLOUR EFFECTS ON THE SKY-DOME AS WELL AS THE SWITCHES OPERATING OTHER STAGE LIGHTS.



MR. JOHN GIELGUD AS HAMLET. OLD
VIC PRODUCTION.

WHEN EAST MEETS WEST

By John Bourne

AN outstanding example of how the amateur dramatic movement can lead the way to better things has recently been provided in Ceylon where a cast of 56 natives of that Island produced "The Wandering Jew" (in English) and thus initiated a Ceylon Dramatic League.

Actors, dresses, scenery, lighting—all were Ceylonese, and only five of the principals did any "doubling" of the 29 speaking parts. Five performances were given; and it is not without significance that three of them were in the Empire Theatre, Colombo—where the native regularly learns to speak American through the medium of the "talkies"—and two at Kandy the hill-capital where rests the sacred tooth of the Lord Buddha. How far, indeed, the Jew has wandered! And how much will the creator of the Jew's part on the stage in Europe be put on his mettle when he learns that a Ceylonese newspaper critic has said of a Mr. Saravanamuttu (in the title role) that "but for an assumed tone of voice he would have out-rivalled Matheson Lang."

When all the facts are examined, this cannot fail to be regarded as one of the most ambitious attempts the East has made to link up with Western drama. Such a fine community effort—as this undoubtedly was—should afford a source of inspiration to the amateur actors of Britain, especially those who have suffered difficulties in their own community drama efforts during the last few months, and who may have been tempted to think that theirs was a hopeless task.

However hard put to, the Western producer never has so much to contend with as his prototype in the East. Caste, the colour question, religion, the restricted public life of women, the conventional outlook of players and audience concerning art in general, and the growing disfavour with which most things Western are regarded—all in some degree have to be taken into consideration. For example, I could find no record of a Ceylonese woman ever having been kissed on the stage! And I doubt whether it would be permitted, even in these advanced days. Assuredly her mother would insist upon being present at all rehearsals! The very

suggestion that "The Wandering Jew" should be produced in Ceylon was subjected to adverse criticism in many quarters, and some of the cast were not happy until certain notable lines in the play had been censored. The word "harlot" as applied to Olalla, and so essential to the full meaning of the play, had to go; and when the programme came to be printed, the name of Olalla was the only one in the phase in which it appeared that stood undescribed. A brief synopsis of the scene cautiously told that Olalla Quintana was "a woman whom the Doctor had befriended."

I am merely referring to these things because they are such definite pointers to the courage and progressiveness which those who initiated the production had to possess. On the whole, however, the effort—which began privately and resulted in the formation of a Dramatic League—marked an immense levelling of interests. Players of various castes who otherwise never met socially, and represented at least five different religions and races, found that the drama had no barriers, but rather that it gave them a common ground, a united outlook and a new sense of values. In a land where social, racial and religious divisions are so overwhelming, surely that is added lustre to the greatness of the drama.

Lest it should be thought that I am using this production of "The Wandering Jew" solely to emphasise its less obvious purpose, let me say that the work revealed, as nothing has before, that the Ceylonese have a very real sense of the stage. Six, at least, of the players are fully up to the best amateur standards of acting in England. The aforementioned Mr. Saravanamuttu (who took the part of the Jew) and Miss Miriam Pieris (Olalla) would more than satisfy a critical audience in this country. Miss Pieris, indeed, is an emotional actress of remarkable power. She is a young Sinhalese of striking personality and has had the advantage of training in England. A severe local critic has described her performance, and that of a young Sinhalese actor Mr. E. C. B. Wijesinghe, as an illustration of how to act "with the whole of the body."

WHEN EAST MEETS WEST

The Asiatic's almost rigid adherence to the declamatory style of acting—possibly due to badly-taught Shakespeare as his only groundwork and vollubility of speech as a national characteristic—is apt to become tedious in performance. This, coupled with a curious propensity for a spoken-English more approximating to the Welsh accent with a dash of Lancashire, adds still more to the difficulties of play-production. The Ceylonese themselves are exceedingly critical of the various accents which, in turn, exist in this strange language-mixture. I have known an educated native audience of one community become restless and annoyed with an actor's diction which would pass without comment among the audience of another community equally advanced in matters of general education.

Curiously enough, the question of colour, while creating immense, and, I feel, unnecessary difficulties in finding Westerners who will swamp the comparative narrowness of their nationality in the universality of the dramatic art, does not affect the actual presentation of a Western play. The coloured actor can make-up "white" with delightful cleverness and is full of resource in other branches of the work.

The Ceylon Dramatic League is pointing to better things in two direct ways. Firstly, it is giving a lead to the purely European Dramatic Club which up to the present, although strong in numbers, has not linked itself up with the British Drama League and for several years has done no serious dramatic work, having relied on well-worn comedies, farces, thrillers and an annual production of Gilbert and Sullivan. Secondly, the Ceylonese themselves have hitherto risked little or nothing beyond a traditional production of a Shakespearean play, and that generally performed by a school, or for purely educational purposes.

So little indeed has the average Ceylonese been helped to appreciate the value of the English drama that he usually thinks of it solely in terms of a comic music-hall sketch, or a farcical one-act play. When, less than six months ago, "The Bishop's Candlesticks" was attempted by an able cast of Europeans and Ceylonese (a rare occasion indeed!) it did not dawn upon a Y.M.C.A. audience, until the piece had got well into its stride, that it could be other than a farce! Quite

serious lines—although given their full value in an excellent stage setting—met with uproarious laughter, and it was only by the sheer ability of the actors that, before the curtain came down, a deeper impression was made.

How much, indeed, does the Ceylonese amateur, now that he is offering more solid food, deserve the sympathy and encouragement of all who have the drama at heart.

THE CRAFTON THEATRE.

THE end of May saw the opening of the Grafton Theatre. This little playhouse in the Tottenham Court Road strikes a new note in the annals of the drama. It is the home of a repertory company devoted to variety. Not the old form of music-hall turns but rather an intimate variety of ideas evolved from an association of poetry, mime, and satire.

In design it is one of the most attractive of London's little theatres. The proscenium-arch, and the aluminium stage-screens designed by Miss Judith Wogan give a fictitious sense of space to the small revolving stage, and make it a stimulating work-room for the producer. The general decoration and auditorium lighting have also been planned by Miss Wogan, and are entirely pleasing.

The opening programme could not fail to interest and thrill the lover of ideas in the theatre even if it was one of promise and provocation, rather than one of perfect achievement. It was a bold stroke to fill the first half with Miss Velona Pilcher's impressionist war play, "The Searcher." Even if one was not in direct sympathy with the medium employed, one was forced to realize that for the portrayal of the nightmare vision of a tortured spirit the impressionist method has obvious advantages over the naturalistic. And one could not help but admire Miss Eleanor Elder's fine interpretation of the Red Cross Searcher.

All the same it is an open question whether in a venture of this kind, which is to be dependant on the outside public, and not of a first night audience or a coterie of club members, the management showed wisdom in presenting such a lengthy and harrowing experiment. But their's was a gallant gesture, and as such is deserving of our praise.

The second half of the programme went from strength to strength with a sketch of bright young people who might have stepped out of a west-end revue, and "Daisy Bell" complete with handle-bars, and as delicious as any music-hall skit from a Bloomsbury Cabaret. Mlle. Lydia Lopokova, who was a Guest Player, enchanted us for an only too brief interlude in Franz Molnar's "The Seven O'Clock"; Miss Edith Sitwell was also a Guest Player on the first night, and gave a reading of her poem "The Drum." This seemed rather in the nature of *caviare*, but no doubt so famous a visitor was felt to give an added distinction to the opening.

Then the programme was brought to a close by a series of burlesque. The richness of Miss Judith Wogan's gift was brilliantly displayed, as was the ripening talent of the rest of the company.

JOSEPHINE THEOBALDS.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of The Village Drama Society was held by kind permission of the Hon. Mary Pakington, M.B.E., at 18, Evelyn Gardens, S.W., on Saturday, May 31st, with Mr. John Hampden in the chair.

Speaking on "Village Drama" Mrs. Penelope Wheeler recommended producers to choose plays that awaken and stimulate the imagination, and are not merely an accurate or realistic representation of everyday life. Producers should aim at developing the natural capacities of their actors; with regard to the playing of Shakespeare in particular there was danger of a producer cramping the performance by insisting on an interpretation that owed its source to reminiscences of past performances and traditional stage business. Village players unhampered by convention would sometimes throw a refreshing and original light on a part, though possibly an incorrect one. In the Trial Scene from "The Merchant of Venice" she had seen on one occasion the Doge presented as a comic character in distinction to a serious Portia and Shylock. Mixed teams of men and women were strongly recommended, and the Women's Institutes urged when possible to include men in their cast.

Mrs. Gregory Nicholson spoke on the development of the V.D.S. County Committee in Essex.

Mr. A. C. Richmond, Secretary of the Joint Board of the National Council of Social Service and the National Federation of Women's Institutes, explained the administration of the grant made by the Trustees of the Carnegie Fund for the training of village producers by means of dramatic schools, lectures on the drama, etc.

Miss Mary Kelly (Hon. Sec.) in reporting on the work of the Society during the year, said that there were now 400 affiliated Branches, and that this by no means represented all the villages with which they were in touch, for during the past three years they had corresponded with 7,000 producers, dramatic secretaries, women's institutes, girl guides, etc. She spoke of the urgent need of more money to carry on the rapidly increasing work, and to help with the removal of the Society from their present premises at 15, Peckham Road, which were to be pulled down within the year. The only solution to the problem would seem either the purchase of a suitable freehold, which would require a sum of £2,000, or to find some kind friend prepared to take a house, and to sublet to the Society. She appealed for funds for this object, for salaries for additional paid workers to cope with the increasing demands, and also for a voluntary worker to help with the Costume Cupboard.

"SAMSON AGONISTES" AT OXFORD

In staging Milton's most perfect poem, the Dramatic Society of Exeter College excused such violation of the poet's ban by pleading ingeniously that "our presumptuous indifference to this intention may be excused in consideration of the fact that his puritan abhorrence of the stage may now be thought at rest." I suspect, however, that there was more than puritan aversion in the Miltonic ban—a reluctant confession that the poem falls short of being drama. Classical in design, splendid in expression and in construction, faithful in every detail to the Sophoclean prototype, it yet lacks one thing essential to Greek tragedy. The

denouement is not the inevitable outcome of preceding events. If this was what Milton realised, his ban is a very natural one; he would not have its merits as a poem obscured by its shortcomings as a staged tragedy. With what courage, therefore, Mr. Nevill Coghill must have been inspired to have adventured into such a production! But his adventure was so salutary that the audiences were left wondering why "Samson Agonistes" has not more often been acted.

The play was produced in the open air of Exeter College gardens during Eights Week at the end of May, when Mr. Coghill was assisted in the work of production by Mr. John Masefield and Mr. Michael Martin-Harvey, while some of the spectacular costumes were lent by Miss Judith Masefield from the Boar's Hill theatre.

The setting was a convenient adaptation of the existing walls of the College, with the addition of a simple stage-set—designed by the producer and Mr. Charles Raikes—to represent the stone exterior of the prison at Gaza. Series of steps provided the several levels which gave the play effective exits and entrances.

In adopting a "statuesque and declamatory technique"—the only possible way of sustaining the tremendous classical oratory—the dramatic resources of actors who are perhaps more at home with the light demands of modern comedy were taxed to the utmost. But the cast were well trained and did not disregard the great Miltonic measures. The chorus of the men of Dan was particularly well drilled.

The performances at Oxford at least added in one way to the full appreciation of the poem, and that is in the passion which lies behind what Milton wrote when he was dealing with subjects very much his own, blindness, matrimonial infelicity and the defeat of political hopes.

ERIC EVANS.

"MUCH ADO" AT BRADFORD.

Allowing for the smallness of the stage, and the deficiencies inevitable on a first night, the performance on March 18th, by the Carlton Street Senior Evening Institute (Shakespearean Class) Students, at the Bradford Technical College must be pronounced as highly creditable to them and their tutor (Mr. W. Greenwood.)

In the earlier part of the evening, one wondered whether the players had not, as our American friends would say, "bitten off more than they could chew." Confidence seemed to be somewhat lacking, voices were lowered unduly, and some—at any rate—of the ladies showed that lack of familiarity with long skirts due to recent fashion. As, however, the performance went on, these defects tended to disappear, though a tendency to speak too rapidly remained.

It was also gratifying to note that Mr. Greenwood had taught his pupils the right use of gesture—some of them, indeed, had learnt their lesson just a little too well—but he had not, in one or two cases, succeeded entirely in eliminating the local accent.

Space does not permit of individual appraisal of the performers, but one exception must be made. Even allowing for recollections of Ellen Terry in the same part, the coquetry, lightness of touch, high spirits and sparkle of Miss Eleanor Brearley as Beatrice made the journey to Bradford worth while.

FREDERICK G. JACKSON.

Hon. Divisional Judge, British Drama League.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

ROTHENBURG

At Whitsuntide the people of Rothenburg, a city set on a hill in south-east Germany thirty miles from Nuremberg, and incidentally one of the finest examples in Europe of a medieval fortified town, celebrate a Festival extending from the Saturday before Whitsunday to the following Tuesday. Every man, woman, and child in the place shares in the commemoration of the role played by Rothenburg in history, and the market square, the fine Renaissance town hall, even the bells and organ of the adjacent church take a definite part in the Festivities.

The proceedings start on Saturday evening with the performance, given in traditional style with an "Announcer" in lieu of programmes, of three short plays by Hans Sachs the sixteenth century cobbler of Nuremberg, interspersed with contemporary music. Everyone who is acquainted with those miniature masterpieces of drama, the Shrovetide plays, knows that the real Hans Sachs was very different from the benevolent, dove-like old gentleman of Longfellow's poem, and though many may find his humour somewhat boisterous and outspoken, yet he is never dull; moreover those who are unable to follow the local dialect cannot fail to be entertained by the admirable sense of comedy shown by the actors.

On the Sunday, a reconstruction of the traditional "Shepherds' Dance," which obviously dates back to pagan rites held in connection with the return of Spring, is held in the market-place. But the chief event is reserved for Whit-Monday, when in the long narrow hall of the Rathaus, "Der Meistertrunk" (The Great Draught) is played, a dramatic incident in the siege of the town during the thirty years war. Rothenburg had adopted the Lutheran faith of the Protestants, and in October 1631 the troops of the Catholic Emperor surrounded the town. The audience is shown the anxious discussion between the Burgo-master and his Council, their resolve to hold out at all costs, and finally, after a vigorous resistance, their surrender, and the triumphant entry of the victorious General Tilly and his staff.

At sunset, a picturesque procession on horseback and foot winds through the streets to the battlements, where the hole blown by the Imperial cannon is still visible, and in the green moat long tables are spread, camp-fires lit, fowls are roasted, and friend and foe sit down together to consume sausages and beer, while the story of suffering and intolerance culminates in a pageant of peace and fellowship. Additional performances of "Der Meistertrunk" without the pageant are given on Sundays throughout the summer.

E. U. OULESS.

ATHENS

The Ginner-Mawer performances at Athens in connection with the recent Festival took place in the Theatre Olympia, and the Odeon Herodes Atticus, which was below the Acropolis. An intense interest was shown by large audiences at both performances in the work of the English Company. The orchestra on both occasions was under the direction of the well-known Athenian conductor Mr. Mitropoulos.

The Greek tour of forty-seven people under the leadership of Ruby Ginner and Irene Mawer was one of extraordinary interest.

BRITISH NORTH BORNEO

The Sandakan Amateur Dramatic Club recently presented at the Padang Theatre "The Unfair Sex," a farcical comedy by Eric Hudson. The play was produced by Mr. Harry Bishop, who also played Geoffrey Trevor, and such is the fame of the Sandakan A.D.C. under his able leadership, that a full house was the result. The scenery is especially worthy of mention, and it was easy to imagine that one was sitting in a theatre at home, enjoying to the full, the play, as one does when on leave. The humorous situations, and delicate complications, combined with dramatic touches, were cleverly brought to the fore, by the well placed cast. The acting was of a high standard, and seldom, if ever, has the Sandakan A.D.C. produced such a successful show. We congratulate the Sandakan A.D.C. on their latest success.

CONWAY HAKE.

LONDON BOYS' CLUBS

The Dramatics competition organised annually by the London Federation of Boys' Clubs took place at the Blackfriars Theatre on May 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th. Four clubs performed on each of the first three evenings, and the best two on each occasion were chosen to perform in the Final on May 8th. The number of entries showed a slight fall for the first time since the inception of this competition. This was due entirely to the inability of some clubs to obtain the services of producers—which services, in all cases, are voluntary.

The Judges were Mr. S. Creagh Henry on May 5th, Miss Ethel Carrington on May 6th, Miss Dorothy Green on May 7th, and on May 8th, Mr. Kenneth R. Barnes, in conjunction with the three judges above mentioned adjudicated at the Final.

Extracts from Shakespeare's plays (in costume) were performed by all the competing clubs, and a packed house witnessed the final. Before presenting the Challenge Cup and Federation medals to the winners Mr. Barnes said that each year he had judged the competition he had been impressed by the steadily improving standard, but he thought that this season the high water mark, both of acting and producing, had been reached.

The result was as follows:—

1. Eton Manor Club (Hackney Wick) in scenes from "Macbeth."
2. St. Andrew's Home and Club (Westminster) in a scene from "Othello."
3. John Benn Hostel (Whitechapel) in scenes from "Much Ado about Nothing."

PARAGON PLAYERS.

Douglas Murray's comedy "Uncle Ned" was played by the Paragon Players at the Paragon Theatre, London, E.16. on the 29th March to a very large and appreciative audience.

The satire in "Uncle Ned" is of a very delicate nature, and much of it is generally lost when played by Amateurs. We must, however, congratulate the P.P.'s on their clever interpretation and on the skilful way in which they "got" the "lines" over.

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"To Meet the King!" was played by Miss Sybil Thorndike at the London Coliseum. Incidental music to these three plays has been written by Norman O'Neill. HENRY AINLEY has written a Foreword to the volume.

Most of these plays by the famous Shoemaker and Meistersinger of Nuremberg, appear for the first time in the English Language. The translations were awarded first prize in the V.D.S. Play-writing Competition.

As a result of the "John o'London's Weekly" Competition many new plays will be added to this Series, of which Mr. G. W. Bishop, Theatre Correspondent of "The Observer," and Member of the Council of the British Drama League, is General Editor. Details of these will be advertised in the Autumn Issue of "Drama." Meanwhile all the plays enumerated opposite are available.

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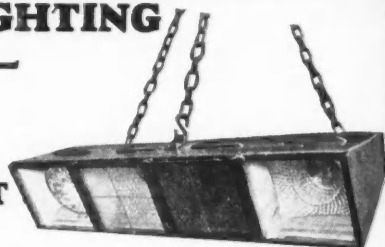
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